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ETHIOPIA

CASE STUDY

Women Candidates Flood Elections

Conferences and training give a boost to potential women politicians



Photo: USAID/Dianne Zemichael

Ethiopian women attend pre-election training for political candidates.

“We don’t lack any skills, we just don’t get the chance and means to participate,” remarked Wubayehu Teferi, a 23-year-old female candidate for Parliament.

Challenge

Ethiopian women trying to enter politics have made significant strides over the last decade. In the early 1990s a Women’s Affairs Office was established in the Office of the Prime Minister to represent women’s issues, and in 1995 gender equality was guaranteed in the constitution. And for the May 2005 election, the government required that 30 percent of Parliamentary candidates in the ruling party would be women. Yet there remains a public perception that women should stay at home, and potential female politicians still lack cohesion and a strong support system.

Initiative

USAID is funding an effort to back Ethiopian women who are trying to enter politics. In March 2005, 175 men and women attended a conference to discuss strategies to overcome the challenges female candidates face and to increase their participation in upcoming elections. Participants also drafted and signed a five-point declaration to support women’s political participation. Fifty female candidates were selected by their respective parties to participate in an intensive two-day candidate training session that highlighted and reinforced leadership skills, public speaking, campaign development, media strategies, fundraising and resource mobilization. USAID also supported a media campaign by the Ethiopian Women’s Media Association that highlighted female candidates and the importance of voting for them.

Results

More than 100 female candidates contesting seats in the May 2005 elections received the pre-election training, which helped them plan their campaigns and discuss principles of governance. The Ethiopian Women’s Media Association, promoted the candidates through radio, TV and billboards, and some of the female candidates won seats in Parliament. A post-election training will be offered to work with the elected female representatives to improve skills and to help them understand Parliamentary operations.